



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview 02/02/2017

Gallagher, Richard T. ~ Oral History Interview

Laura Orleans

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Richard Gallagher [RG]

Facts about this person:

Age 52
Sex Male
Occupation Electrical Engineer, Chris Electronics
Residence (Town where lives) Braintree, MA
Ethnic background (if known)

Interviewer: Laura Orleans [LO]

Transcriber: Laura Silverman [LS]

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Key Words

Chris Electronics, Gallagher Marine Services, Hall Spars, electronic fishing equipment repair, vessel monitoring, EPRIB, AIS, GPS, satellite phones, side band, satellite compass, autopilot, VHF, safety precautions, relationships with customers, language barriers in the fishing industry, marine electronics companies in New Bedford, relationships between coworkers.

Abstract

In this interview Richard Gallagher, an electrical engineer at Chris Electronics in New Bedford, MA, shares his work history, discusses various electrical components of boats, details his daily work, and explains the relationships with customers, fishermen, and between co-workers at Chris Electronics.

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[00:00] Introduction to the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center project and to Richard Gallagher. Richard gives some information about his family background and where he has lived.

[5:31] Richard summarizes his work experience with boats starting in high school, beginning his own marine electronics business, and working for other companies.

[10:04] Richard explains how he learned about electrical engineering, through academic studies, on-the-job training, and troubleshooting. He begins to explain how scallopers use electronic equipment to fish.

[15:00] Fishermen's reactions to increased use of technology on boats, how repairs to technology has changed on fishing equipment over the years.

[20:09] Using technology to avoid by-catch and to monitor fishing, technology for safety on fishing boats.

[24:47] Typical technology to be found in the wheelhouse of a New Bedford scalloper.

[29:58] Typical work days during the busy summer season, where repairs are made on a fishing boat, tools that Richard uses, working together to make repairs.

[35:10] Working outside in all weather, working up in the rigging of a boat, dangerous working conditions.

[39:46] Important skills for an electrical engineer to have, relationships with customers, language barriers, dirtiness of working in boats, necessary clothing for doing electrical work, necessity of understanding computers to troubleshoot equipment problems.

[45:19] Other local marine electronics companies, different locations where Chris Electronics has done work, marine electric jargon and terminology.

[49:57] Dialects among fishing crews from different areas of the east coast, joking between employees at Chris Electronics, history of ownership of Chris Electronics.

[54:41] End of audio

[0:00]

LO: Okay, so I'm actually recording onto your mic there too.

RG: Okay.

LO: Um, so today is...

RG: The second.

LO: The second. It's Groundhog Day, isn't it?

RG: It is, yes.

LO: February 2nd, in the year 2017. This is an interview for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, funded by an Archie Green Fellowship from the Library of Congress. As part of this project we are interviewing shore side workers in the New Bedford/Fairhaven fishing industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge, and better understand their important role in the fishing industry. This recording and the transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. And I am speaking to Rick, and I didn't get your last name.

RG: Rick Gallagher.

LO: Rick Gallagher, today and we're here at Chris Electronics in New Bedford, and it is just about 2:00 in the afternoon.

RG: Do you want to... I'm sorry.

LO: Oh, to shut the door?

RG: Maybe.

LO: So, I will ask you to sign something at the end...

RG: Okay.

LO: ...but, just for the record, do you give us permission to record your voice?

RG: Yes, I do.

LO: Thank you. So what I'm going to ask you to do is just sort of introduce yourself, your full name, and what your job is here at Chris Electronics.

RG: My name's, Rick Gallagher. I'm 52 years old. I've been working for Chris Electronics since, jeez, fall of 2002? I come from Braintree, Massachusetts, so I have the hour drive down to this area, but it's against Boston, or opposite traffic so it's an easy ride down. And what else?

LO: That's a good start. So you said you're 52, um, if you don't mind, when, when and where were you born?

RG: I was born, well, it was Boston Lying In Hospital, so I was born in Boston.

LO: Okay.

RG: Which I guess has long been torn down, the hospital.

LO: And, birth date?

RG: Oh, uh, December 17, '65.

LO: Okay. And did you grow up in the Boston area?

RG: I grew up in Braintree. So school system through Braintree, after graduating high school I ended up down at the time, Southeastern Mass University, which is now UMass Dartmouth, and started off there with a, in their electrical engineering, technology department, and then ended up graduating with a liberal arts degree. Yup.

LO: So that's interesting. And then you kind of found your way back.

RG: Yes, and I've always been that hands-on mechanical inclined, and that's what this industry lends itself to. And can grasp, you know, basic electrical concepts and the equipment, what is needed to service the equipment, you know, we've had training throughout the years from the manufacturers and the prior, or the prior owner of the company is, was also a good teacher to us too, and, pick up courses and get certification along the way.

LO: Okay. So I am going to ask you a bit more about how you learned, but that's a good start. Before we go there, I'm curious, what can you tell me about your family's ethnic background or heritage?

RG: Well, I guess I'm a half-breed. My mother's side of the family is French, they came down through Canada. My great-grandfather settled in Lewiston, Maine, and they ran some, you know, ran businesses up there. Actually one of my uncles was running the furniture business that was started through my great-grandfather up there, Marcotte Furniture, until a few years. And now that business has been sold out of the family, but, so the, the DuBois, Marcottes and Shebots were all related and they were settled in the area of Lewiston, Maine. My mother ended up, when she went into a nursing program up there and then came down to Boston College to get her RN and then settled in the area down here and eventually met my father. My father grew up in Wollaston, Mass, which is part of Quincy, Mass, and his side of the family came from a sailing family. So they were always involved in more of the small boat sailing in the area. They all did pretty well for themselves in racking up awards in the racing circuit. And then after my parents met, got married, they lived in Jamaica Plain for awhile and then moved out to Braintree. Settled in there. And then grew up in Braintree as I said earlier, lived in South Boston for awhile,

Watertown, and then moved back into the town of Braintree and then eventually after my parents passed away we took over the house and renovated it and that's where we're living now.

[5:31] LO: So sounds like you come by the hands-on nature of your skills, sort of honestly, if you will...

RG: Mmm hmm.

LO: ...you know, in terms of at least the furniture business?

RG: Well, I mean, yeah, I think I picked, you know, my father was, I guess you'd say mechanically, a fix-it, mechanically inclined. I picked that up as a kid. First real job in high school was working at a boat shop. You know, I grew up around small boats, worked at a boat shop and that place, which is no longer in business anymore, but they were a small boat dealer and, you know, we put together the sunfish, the holy cats, did whatever, demonstrated them for the people. From there worked, where did I go after that? Then I worked, as college came around, I worked at another boat dealer and, you know, had more responsibilities, different types of jobs, but more of getting the new boats, bigger boats, say like twenty, you know, thirty foot cruising sailboats ready for customers, doing warranty work, prepping them, installing the electronics that they wanted, cutting them in. And then, let's see, for awhile, then I worked for another electronics company in the area, doing the same thing, marine electronics.

LO: And was this after you had the training, that you, at SMU, or...

RG: This would be during. This would be my college years.

LO: Yup.

RG: Once I finished up school, um, you know, started interviewing for quote "the real job," but I kept getting calls to work on people's boats from people that I had met over the years. And word had gotten out and I kept saying yes, yes, and yes, and I finally made a business out of it for ten years, doing that.

LO: What was the name of that...

RG: I called it Gallagher Marine Services, yup.

LO: Yup.

RG: So full-blown in the summer, in the winter, when it would slow down I was able to work for another company called Hall Spars in Rhode Island. And then pick up again in the spring and, and run through the summer. And in that business I did more, concentrated on the sailboats, but did the rigging aspect of it, again electronics, minor engine work, minor fiberglass repair. Then I got out of the industry for awhile, worked for a company called Unistrut up in Woburn. They were like a metal, I want to say they, metal products. Prefabricated metal channels. So they were going to build say mezzanines and warehouses, or supports in hospitals for the x-ray machines.

So I managed the warehouse for them for, I think two years or so, two or three years, and then they closed down the operation in Woburn. And then, came back [recording garbled] they were, built products in the marine industry out of carbon fiber. And that was also what we were doing at Hall Spars, I was in that division down in Bristol in their carbon fiber division. So, I'm trying to keep my timeline straight here. From there, I believe from there is when I ended up down here, you know, I was between jobs and someone recommended me to Bob, Bob called me up, I came down and talked to him, and he hired me. And I've been here since.

LO: Well it sounds like you have quite a range of experience, everything from sailboats and, like you said, recreational boating to, you know, and management, to the actual marine...

RG: Yeah, I mean obviously the years running the own business you're doing everything, you know, putting the word out there, getting your face out there. Putting the quotes together, selling it, installing it, servicing it, and making the customers happy.

[10:04] LO: So, and you had started to kind of talk about the actual learning and that, you know, some of it was, was book learning, so to speak in the university setting, but a lot of it was kind of learning from the guys. Tell me a little bit more about that more hands on, informal learning, as you recall it?

RG: Well I think, you know, some of it was done on my own as far as, as reading up on my own. Some of it was, again, you know, shown by working on the job, and part of it was from the manufacturers too. And I'd say the most, the greatest learning time was doing the troubleshooting; putting the equipment together and wiring it up and installing it is one thing, but you really learned when things didn't go wrong, and then you, you know, you're forced to dive into it and research and then figure out what, what, you know, why isn't it working. Oh, I see, it, you know, I see it's working here, but it's not working down there. What's causing that not to happen and kind of dissecting it. And then at, you know, a lot of it too has been good support from the manufacturers and then, you know, once you've gone through it once you can apply it to other situations that arise in the field.

LO: So as new products come along are there trainings that are provided, or you know, how does that work?

RG: There, there is, it's more of an introduction to the new product, you know, this is a new radar. Here's why it's better than the old one. Here's some of the features it can do, and maybe a general overview of how to install it or how to network it with other equipment or, or tie it in. And maybe some overviews of situations that they've heard of that arise in the field that say hey guys we've noticed that once in awhile this issues crops up and here's the fix for it. A lot of times it's us telling them, too, that, you know we've put this equipment on and we've got this problem. And then, well, we're not aware of that, you know.

LO: Do they do a lot of field testing before the product goes on the market, or...

RG: I'm sure they do. I don't know how much and, I'm sure some equipment gets tested better than others, as with any, you know, any manufacturer. But for the, you know, most part, it does

work out of the box and it works but they can't cover all the scenarios that we run into, you know?

LO: So tell me just sort of backing up, about the role of electronics in fishing industry?

RG: The role...

LO: Or the, yeah, the different ways that one would, the different kinds of apparatuses that you might find...

RG: Yeah, I mean, they obviously use them as tools to help them fish better, and the game is getting home, getting to the spot they want to be to, and getting home safely, is the navigation part. And then the fishing part of it is the equipment that helps them find the fish or to get a better handle on what's underneath the water on them, bottom detail, and, and depending the type of fishing they do, dictates the type of equipment that they kind of concentrate on. So scallopers drag to scallop, so they're very interested in what's the bottom looks like, contour, you know, hardness, roughness, terrain of the bottom. Are there a lot of boulders down there that can snag their equipment, things like that. And it's handy for them to have bottom sounding equipment that can get them a better profile of the bottom, and also to mark where they've been on the chart. Because the way they fish, they may, you know, run their dredge down and then they want to turn around and come back and they, if they had a particularly good run on that line per se, they'll want to maybe come back parallel to that line so far apart, you know? And then they want to be able to mark it so they can reference it, where they were...

LO: So...

RG: ...on the trip.

LO: ...I'm curious, ...

RG: So that's what's gotten better over the years, is giving them equipment that can help them pinpoint where they were on the ocean bottom, per se, where before they were guessing.

[15:00] LO: And how receptive do you find, I mean, I'm curious if there's variation in how receptive the fisherman is to all the new technology based on their age, perhaps, because I would think that some of the old timers kind of pride themselves on...

RG: I, you know...

LO: ...being able to navigate, you know...

RG: It, it's, I think it's, it's like us in society.

LO: Yup.

RG: Some people can't stand having an iPhone and people love it. Yeah, there's a little, a little bit of an, you know, age seems to matter where that majority is, but even, you know, there's some of the older guys out there that embrace it. And they, because they understand it or they're used to working with it. As with anything else, you throw something really new and different to these guys, or anyone in general it's the learning curve. How to use it, how to interpret it. So I equate it, it was the same thing with technology in our lives, you know? Maybe your grandparents, some of them feel they don't want to touch it, they can't understand it, they're going to break it, some are curious and learn it and, and are quite good at it, you know? They're keeping up with their grandkids. So I, you know, that's, that's how it kind of runs in the industry too, you know..

LO: And you've been, it sounds like, in and out of the industry over the last, say, thirty years?

RG: Well, I've been, I've been in it more than out of it.

LO: Yeah.

RG: And I'm really out of it for maybe three years.

LO: So tell me a little bit about how what you've seen changed over those years?

RG: Well, on the fishing, like fishing side, is really my exposure started in 2002. So I mean, regulation is a, you see that affect people, you know. And so like what the draggers are going through. You know, scallopers I know they've had their, their issues, but they seem to be doing pretty well and that seems to be our sustainable, hearty, what's the word I'm looking for, um...

LO: Resource?

RG: Thank you. Resource. And they're managing it well. There's definitely, you know, there's more management going on and been implemented in this, you know, since 2002.

LO: What about the ways in which the technology has evolved?

RG: Yeah, the electronics have, the biggest change is the older equipment had probably a longer life because it was fixable, and that's what changing with the new equipment like the things in our home. For us to go in and repair them it's, you know, it's all more printed circuit boards with really, really tiny components, and, and we're not fixing the individual component as much anymore. We're replacing a board. Where back when I started and, you know, Bob Dickson, that was kind of his reputation. He could fix your equipment and we could get the parts and he's got the knowledge and the education to do board level, and we have a couple guys in the shop that are the same way too. But it's the way the equipment's built today; it isn't really designed to be as serviceable on our bench, and, I mean, so now we're more, we troubleshoot it down to a board and we order a board and replace it, or replace a component or a section, rather than individual parts. You know.

LO: Um, I'm curious too, you mentioned a little bit, the regulations. Does, does the technology interface with that at all?

RG: Well, yes as far as vessel monitoring. That gets reported back to these agencies which is, has increased since at least I started being aware of it. You know, when I first came in it was the scallopers, and if I remember correctly, those regs were kind of just coming in and the equipment to do it was just coming on line, and we were involved in it. I mean, we were involved in it from the get go and, and the earlier equipment that was doing it was what we called Boat Tracks, is a company. And then others have, you know, come up and some have gone and have tried to build different equipment. So now we've seen different industries are getting into that monitoring too, that need to have the equipment. You know, different fisheries, that's what I was trying to say earlier.

LO: Yup, sure. And in terms of the fish finding aspect, is there also sort of a fish avoidance aspect with the limit on quota... Using technology to kind of see what's there and see...

[20:09] RG: Well, there is. I know there, and that's where I'm not too up on that regulation side of it, but there is more concern on what they call the by-catch, of catching, bringing up other species in the net besides what they're primarily going after. And, say, with what we're noticing with the swordfish boats, is a program's been implemented, well, recently, last couple of years where they're pretty much, it's a video feed. It's got cameras on the area where they're landing the fish and that video is recorded onto a hard drive and stored, and then the hard drives are sent off to, I'm not sure where. And I got it, I'm a little rusty on that, but I, that's one way to keep them being monitored, that they're not pulling up fish that they shouldn't be, or landing that they shouldn't be. And the, you know, swordfishing, like the long liners though, they sometimes can't control what, what gets hooked, so I'm a little rusty on, I mean, if the fish bites, is on the hook, I don't know whether they're trying to keep an eye on them that they're getting released from the hook and letting them go, or it's more that they're not landing it on the boat.

LO: And then what about the safety side? Is EPIRB part of what your equipment does?

RG: Well, yeah, safety has improved as far as, you know, rescue or if an issue arises. AIS is a safety device that's come out which, it's called an added feature to radar, a radar basically, a chart plotter. But it paints a target, well it's like a airplane transponder you see in the movies when they got the blip and they can tell, oh, that's such and such a plane. It's a similar technology. So it will paint a boat icon on a radar screen or a chart plotter. And then they can navigate with the crosshairs or their curser to that and pull up the information of the boat name, registration number, the call sign. So that helps the guys out if they, and it'll show the course of the boat so they can determine this guy, person, may be a problem to me on my course. So they can, now they have a name to call instead of, hey boat traveling, I think at ten knots at a bearing of 400 or 300 degrees easterly. So now they can hail it and what they've, guys have reported, there's like, you know, I get a response now. If I can put a name out there, I'll get a response a lot quicker or more often than in the old days when we were just putting out a blank call to an unnamed vessel. EPIRBs, like you said, are still a major piece of safety equipment on all the boats. And the EPIRB technology has gotten better where they, you know, the units now, instead of one that is just for the boat, you and I can buy one, a personal one, and have it on our body, you know, which is handy if you get washed overboard. Because that'll send out a position fix. And that's probably one of the best ways to recover someone when you can't see them in the water, is to

have their lat long. You know, I'm sure there are survival suits, we're not on that side of it, but I know they're more regular with having survival suits and, and that equipment. But in electronics-wise AIS has been a great help in navigating. Because they also, on the radar you just see blips, and sometimes blips could be, you know, if it's wavy, waves can send back a signal that could show up as a blip, or with the AIS now they can see a blip and if the target or the boat is on top of that blip or right next to it, they know that that is probably a moving boat and not a stationary boat, or not a false echo.

LO: So take me in the wheelhouse of a typical New Bedford boat, scalloper, let's say.

RG: Okay.

LO: What would I find, what are the electronic units that, ..

RG: They...

LO: ...that you guys might be installing

[24:47] RG: Well, say on the average size the mid, you know, mid-size to larger scallopers you see in the harbor here, for safety you're going to have a couple GPSs, which give them the lat long. Some of those GPSs could also be a GPS combination chart plotter that show the charts there, and you know, the boat on the chart. Or they'll have computers are always on the boats now, again, running navigation software and then maybe some other software that they need in the background. Sat phone is going to be on it, so they can get weather information or also make a phone call or call into the office and for an emergency. And that's another thing that's improved in the years too, just like cell phones, sat phones before were usually fixed on the boat, you know, a big item you installed and it stayed with the boat. Satellite phones are now coming down to the size of your phone, your iPhone. Not as thin, but the same height. So now if they're on a situation they can grab the phone out of the charging cradle and have it in a lifeboat if they need to, and then have contact, still. So we said GPS, a chart plotter, radar, and usually there are two of those, the GPSs depending on the type of chart plotter where it's on the computer or a fixed, standalone chart plotter. But there'd always be usually two types of devices like that for plotting where they are on a map. I said radars, right?

LO: Mmm hmm.

RG: Your fish finder and fish finder, maybe a bottom sonar. I said sat phone. Single side band, which is, you know, with the advent of sat phones is becoming less and less, but a side band is a reliable means of cheap communication in almost anywhere in the world. So that, we still put on side bands. Jeez, what do I feel like... a satellite compass now is, is becoming more norm, so instead of your fixed, your gimbaled compass or electronic compass on the boat, which on a steel boat, an electronic compass still relies on magnetism, and the magnetic field, so they present a challenge on the steel boats. A satellite compass is based on GPS, so a steel boat. It isn't really based on the magnetism, it's based on the GPS satellites and getting a fix from them. The problem is with the scallopers and all the metal up top that sometimes poses a problem on the installation side, because of signals bouncing around and screwing up the compass heading. But

we can usually fix that. So we got satellite compass, and autopilot. That is pretty much standard, because that's the extra crew member, you know, on their long steams out to the fishing grounds and back it helps reduce fatigue for the person, the captain, or whoever's up in the wheelhouse, instead of having to be on the wheel and keeping the boat going where it needs to be. Satellite TV, as the technology of that has gotten better and the price has come down, we can put them on boats now and that satellite TV signal, they'll get a signal no matter just about any condition they're into, unless maybe heavy rain just like a home, but the bouncing and rolling of the boat, the antennas are gimbaled electronically and they can lock on a satellite and keep focused on the satellite. So that's a big improvement because the guys, especially in the fall when the football season starts up. That's sometimes more important than any other of your equipment, when we get panic calls for. We're getting ready to leave and the satellite TV's down! So XM, Sirius/XM radio, because again, the reception out there is, that's usually on all the boats now. I think I've covered like the basics that you would see, you know. Yeah. You know, individual pieces. Now those pieces usually get wired together to pass information on to each other and share information, so.

[29:58] LO: So, I don't know if there even is such a thing as a typical day, do you have a typical day?

RG: Not in summer. You know, not in the spring till late fall. I could...

LO: What time does the day start? Maybe that's a good...

RG: The shop opens up at eight, and, you know, we try to maintain that eight to five, or eight to four thirty, the eight-hour day. In the height of the busy season, that wasn't happening. Everyone's, you know, working overtime and a typical day could be that I thought I had my day planned out on where I was going to go, or the jobs I was going to do, and then we get a call from a fishing boat that's trying to leave and nothing's working. And then our business, you know, fishing boats take precedence, because they're our bread and butter. But now we're expanding into other areas, say, the commercial tugs and ferries, and then we get into juggling priorities, because a ferry, obviously, can't be down. So we will find ourselves constantly rearranging our life during the hectic season.

LO: And how much of the work happens here at the shop versus out there on the boats? I mean, obviously not out at sea, but dockside?

RG: Yeah, the majority of our work is...

LO: Here?

RG: Nope, is done out on the boat, because the equipment's there, we're installing it on the boat, we'll troubleshoot it there. The shop is if we can take it off the boat, can't fix it on the boat, and we can take it off the boat and bring it to the shop here. But, like I said, that's somewhat becoming less and less because of the way things are repaired, you know. We're not doing as much of the tearing the equipment apart on the bench here and replacing a transistor or a diode or

a, you know, well there aren't really tubes anymore, but, so. I do see, oh, sorry. It seems less and less, and, in my own case, I'm less and less on the bench in there than when I first started.

LO: So do you have, I'm imagining a doctor bag that you set out with. Are there...

RG: Yeah, I mean we all have our tool bags and we all set them up different depending what we like. My tool bag is, you know, different than Jamie, Bill's, or Dave's or Nate's here. You know, yeah, we all have the basic tools in there, you'll find screwdrivers, pliers, you know, nippers, maybe some smaller tools, the smallest screwdrivers to get in. Soldering irons, we've all got to have soldering irons. Then it, you know, we branch out different. Like over the years you may have figured a way to test something and made a little contraption that'll set it up, or jumper cables to make it easy to plug into equipment, you know, so that would be unique to each of us. You have a multi-meter...

LO: Do you share that information?

RG: Oh yeah, I'll pass, you know, if I discovered something or, you know, made something up that I thought made life easier, then I'll, you know, tell them, and it's up to them if, yeah. But yeah, we do pass, we pass information along freely. You know, especially things that we, hiccups or when we're troubleshooting something and discover a fix that, you know, we've been struggling with, then that gets passed around. Or, you know, hey, I was on this piece of equipment and it was doing this on me, it was doing this error, we've never seen that before. Have you? You know, so that too. You know, we have, we have connectors, we have parts boxes with connectors so we can make connections up in the field, plugs, crimp connectors, radio RF connectors so we can replace bad connectors on antennas, and cabling to the radio equipment, things like that. Oh, that's what I, VHF is going to be on every boat. How did I miss that one? Yup. But our, our initial tool bag, like for house calls, per se, I try to keep it light, one tool bag. Installation is different. Then everything comes out. Could be saws, could be hammers, could be, you know, drills. Things to, devices to help us pull cable, you know, when the cable's on the spools, little cable spools things, but for the most part I have, and, and most of us have like one bag or a pack that is the go-to, is with us everywhere, because it's got the basics in there.

[35:10] LO: You must be kind of the heroes when that sat TV is down.

RG: When the sat TV's down. Yeah. Yup. Definitely. They really get appreciative on that.

LO: So, I get the sense you like your work.

RG: I do.

LO: What do you like most about it?

RG: It's ever-changing. It's great when the weather's nice because you're outside. You put up with the winter because you know it's going to get better again and the warm weather will be around, hopefully soon. But even when I work on the like the type of commercial vessels, if we need to be outside, these boats are running so there's heat. So there's some place to escape to. It's

not like on the recreation side where they're on the smaller boats that'll put together, put to bed for the winter, they're in a storage yard and usually there's no heat on them. Yeah, you get lucky if they're on an indoor storage place, but so that is good. We can, you know, on these bigger boats where we've got to be outside, replacing antennas or running new cables, we've got a place to go to get warm, and once we get the outside work done we're inside doing the other side of the work, the inside work.

LO: So when things are, are dockside, a lot of times they're rafted two, three, four deep?

RG: Yeah.

LO: And you guys have to...

RG: Yeah, that gets tired.

LO: Yeah.

RG: It's, if, especially if you obviously have a lot of bulky things to bring out...

LO: Yeah.

RG: ...you know, like a, like an installation.

LO: Or if it's snowing and icy.

RG: Yeah, and that is, you know, there are, there are times that we will, you know, after a fresh snow, we'll readjust our schedule that, you know, we're not going to do that type of installation or service work on that boat if it's not an emergency, because it is treacherous on the boats until they get shoveled off or the snow melts. Yup, yup. And...

LO: Does... Oh, sorry.

RG: I was going to say, and, you know, we're up in the rigging, up in the superstructures, so...

LO: Oh really?

RG: Good climbing skills are kind of inherently needed, yup. Good balance.

LO: And is that, do you have a choice? I mean, is it sort of like, well, Rick will do that, but so-and-so doesn't like to climb, or...

RG: Yeah, I mean, sometimes we'll, you know, [recording garbled] with the strengths, who is more comfortable aloft or not. You know, if we will, if it's possible, and the work needs it, you know, we will have the boat moved to an area where they can bring like a man lift in, and work from that, work from that instead. Sometimes it's just easier to get the job done, and if it's safe to do it, to just climb up, you know. A lot of times, as you see, you know, they've got the crew's

nest up there and it's safe, but, other times [recording garbled] radars because of the, what needs to be is, is mounted way out on a platform like, and, and it may not be the easiest to get to. But we also have harnesses, and, you know.

LO: Have you ever had a close call?

RG: You know, if I have, I blocked it out. I think I did once. I had one of those, it wasn't as close as it could be, but it could've been, you know, like a, just a slipped grip a little bit. But, you know, I try not to take risks when I don't need to, and be careful, and work slow. So, yeah.

LO: So you, ...

RG: And we will say, you know, if we don't feel, if I don't feel comfortable, it's like, this is not the day for me to be doing that. Or this is not the conditions. We've got to, we've got to figure something else out.

LO: Have you had younger guys coming in, or less experienced guys coming in that you've taught?

RG: Yeah, I mean, we've, we have people, guys have come and gone, so yes, yup, we've had younger guys in and, you know, they, some, they've come from all different aspects; some with no experience, some with some experience. Some out of the Voc Tech, or, or we had an intern that was at the Voc Tech that wanted to explore if this was something they were interested in, so, you know, we've, pick them up from everywhere I guess, yeah.

LO: So, you were, you were sort of, not joking, I think they were real skills as far as balance and stuff like that, ability to climb. But what are the sort of the skills that make a good, you know, make somebody last in this business?

[39:46] RG: I think not getting frustrated at the problems that you're presented with is the biggest thing. Not letting the customer get under your skin. You know, some are, like anywhere else, you've got people that are great and people that, that may not be so great. And you just can't let that bother you, you know? You know.

LO: And what does that look like, some, a customer that's...

RG: Oh, you might get blamed for everything that's broken on the boat, you know. You know, for the most part, we get along with them great, but I think, you know, we all have our different personalities and, and each of us here that works, being different, has different people that, personalities that they like and get along with and don't. And I think, I just, I seem to like all our customers, you know.

LO: That's good. Do you tend to work in pairs when you go out, or mostly alone?

RG: It depends on the job. Like a lot of the troubleshooting we're alone, you know, doing it. Installations, depending on the size and scope of the job we're either paired up or it could be the

whole, all of us, on one job, if it's a big job to try to get it out quick, or, again, that changes based on the job and what needs to get done, you know.

LO: And there's certainly a lot of Portuguese-speaking folks in the industry, some Spanish-speaking. Do you find language is ever a...

RG: Once in awhile.

LO: ...challenge?

RG: Yeah. Yup. And, you know, that's, I find that difficult and, and because I don't speak any other languages and luckily I don't run across it a lot where if, if they, you know, it's broken English and we can manage to get through, or there's someone around that we can, you know, talk through. Yup.

LO: So, is there an aspect to the job that is your least favorite? Most challenging?

RG: Pulling wires in a dirty, greasy bilge. You know, the grimy, I mean, there's a lot of, there's a lot of clean work, there's a lot of dirty work too. I mean, the nature of the boats, you know, you're in engine rooms that are, can be oily or, you know, or the fish guts depending on the type of boat, the age of the boat. You know, they pick up grime and they can be dirty, and some aren't, but typically a lot of the older the boats are showing their age and yeah. You know it's not fun when you start off the day and in the first hour you've got, you know, grease all over your clothes because you know, you try to prepare for it, but once in awhile...

LO: And is there special clothing involved?

RG: ...you get caught off guard.

LO: You ever, do you...

RG: Like safety clothing?

LO: Yeah, or any gloves, or...

RG: I mean, not really that we're required...

LO: Yeah.

RG: ...you know and there's...

LO: But just maybe for comfort or for...

RG: I think that's every, like I don't wear gloves as much as I can even when it's cold, because I need my fingers, you know? I mean obviously there are days that you have to wear them, but I try, you know, that ...

LO: Knee pads?

RG: Yeah, that's handy.

LO: Yup.

RG: Yup. Yup, you know, you're on your, we're on our knees a lot.

LO: Yup.

RG: Because the way equipment's mounted or we're underneath cabinets or consoles, so yeah, we do scurry around a lot on our knees, yup. So knee pads are good. Comfortable shoes is a big plus, you know, good grip. Just dressing right in comfortable layers, you know, in the winter, so you can bulk up or shed down. But in the summer, I mean, we're, we can, we'll go down to shorts, so, I mean, we're not, thank God, I mean, I don't know how it'd be, I'd survive if I had to wear long pants doing this work in the summer, but. So. Yup.

LO: Let's see. I think we've actually covered most of what I had in mind.

RG: Well that's good.

LO: Yeah. Is there anything you, that I haven't touched on that you think would be important to share?

RG: No, I mean you, you know, there, you can make a living in this field, there's no doubt about that. The struggle these days is keeping up with the education and the equipment is going more and more, you know, in the, like the computer side of networking, the way, so, you know, I think some of the younger guys coming into this, if they've gotten more of the schooling on the network protocols and wifi, things like that, you know, they're going to be doing good. Because the, a lot of the, the majority of the troubleshooting now is, is somewhat easy where you can associate it to a component on the device easy and replace it. It's not that easy, but it's easier. I mean, you know, I don't have to get out my multi-meter a lot and check different areas on a board, you know. Usually we have an idea from the symptoms where the problem's at.

[45:19] LO: Sure.

RG: Yup.

LO: And how many shops are there that are doing similar work here in in this area, New Bedford, Fairhaven?

RG: That we know of? There is, uh T&K Electronics over in Fairhaven, near the shipyard. And actually, uh, T&K, Tony got a start here.

LO: Oh did he?

RG: Yeah. And then he went, he started with Bob, if I remember, he was at the Voc Tech, started here when he was there, or just out of the Voc Tech, I forget exactly. Worked for this company, then he went to a company called Tomtronics, which isn't around anymore. I, don't hold me to that, but I believe they are not around. And then Tony came back here, and then he ended up going out on his own. There's a company over at Bayline Marine, called S&K Electronics, but he concentrates more on the recreation side than on the commercial stuff. We do it all. We do recreation, we do commercial.

LO: And do you interface much with the Fairhaven shipyard? With new, you know, if there's new construction?

RG: We have.

LO: Yeah.

RG: Yup, we have done some of the new boats that've come out of there in the past, not recently, but we have. We've, there's a few of the customers that have boats up here that are having boats built down in Alabama that we're involved with putting the whole electronics on, so we've done trips down there. As far as a brand new build, you know. I mean, we travel. We've gone to Virginia because, you know, the boats are up here for awhile and they may go down to Virginia or other warmer areas in the winter, or depending on their, you know, they may scallop up here and then as the seasons change, scallop down south. So we, we've, you know, traveled down into Virginia to work on the boats.

LO: How far north do you go?

RG: Well, we do Boston, we've gone up, you know, Gloucester, we have some boats up there. We did awhile back ago, there were the big herring processor boats that were based out of Gloucester that we did, well actually one was a new build that we put the electronics on, again, that was built down south and then came up and we finished it up in Gloucester, but we were down in Alabama and then. Usually the boats are built in Ala-, you know, somewhere and we get the base stuff on, and the boat makes it back up here to be finished, the final fitting out and we'll do the rest to finish up, up here. Gloucester, New Hampshire, Maine, on occasion, so, yup.

LO: I have a fascination with, sort of, the language of the industry. Is there, sort of, particular jargon or terminology that's unique to the marine electronics piece? I mean, certainly tools and some of the names for the equipment, I guess, but...

RG: Yeah, I mean, we've, we come up with, with nicknames for...

LO: Oh yeah?

RG: .. I mean, not, now I can't think of any, but there was, there's a symptom with the computers that in order to bring data into the computers, and because they don't have a particular plug anymore, they've got the USB, so there's an adaptor cable that's made to make that interface still

happen. And sometimes that adaptor cable mimics a ballpoint serial mouse on the computer and the curser just goes crazy and you have no control over your mouse until you unplug the device. So that's become a technical term, it's called crazy mouse. So if I say I was on a boat and I had to solve the crazy mouse, everyone knows exactly what I needed to do, you know, oh, the USB to serial adaptor went screwy. You know, jargon on the fishing side, you know, those guys will sometimes throw out terms that I'm not aware of, obviously, because of the fishing equipment, you know, they're referring to the way they set lines up to drag or things like that, and you know, draggers have terminology on how to control the nets, I mean, that's, you know...

LO: Oh yeah, you can really study it.

[49:57] RG: Yeah, right, exactly. But, you know, you get the different accents obviously from different people from the regions they're from. You got the guys that come up south that are working on the boats, or the boats from up south, you know, boats, some of the boats that may be from Maine passing down, so you get a little bit of different dialects and things like that and of course, you know, in this area, the ethnicity with Portuguese and, what's the word I'm looking for, nationalities. So, Vietnamese, yup. Irish, you know, the herring boats were, most of them were based for the Irish people, or a part Irish crew, some from Ireland direct, you know, others been here for awhile. Yeah. I mean, and, yeah, we have nicknames for things or equipment, but unfortunately I'm...

LO: Trying to...

RG: It's escaped me right at the moment.

LO: Yup.

RG: Yeah.

LO: And what about, you know, I always here, in lots of different occupations, that there's, there's humor, within, you know, amongst the people who work, or there's, if you get a new person you might...

RG: Yeah, we have...

LO: ...workplace...

RG: Unfortunately the last one in the company always gets picked on in the loving, joking way, you know. Uh, or the newest guy. Yeah, I mean ...

LO: Anything stand out?

RG: No, as far as, I, I think we just, you know, pick on them, and pick on people in a friendly way. You know, it's all joking around, really.

LO: Do you have nicknames within the company here?

RG: No, you know, we don't here. No, nothing like Sparky or because they blew up a lot of components or things like that. No, we try not to get those nicknames. Yup. But no, no we don't have any nicknames like that. No. I say that, and then Jamie will probably have a whole bunch of other stories, but...

LO: Things you _____.

RG: Yeah, exactly. No, I, I think, you know, we do work well with each other, which is nice.

LO: That's good.

RG: You know. Especially if one of us is in a bind on something. So.

LO: And you've got the shop dog.

RG: Yes, we have two, actually. Yeah, we have a bigger one, Charlie, who's a Cheseapeake Lab, he's Dave Frank, the current owner...

LO: Yup.

RG: That's his dog, so. He's not here today.

LO: Oh, you know what I was going to ask, was...

RG: Yes.

LO: ... as far as the history of the business, it's been around awhile. Do you know when it started?

RG: You know, our sweatshirts say over thirty, or thirty years, but I believe we've been longer than that, because Bob Helgeland, started it, no Chris Helgeland, I'm sorry, Chris Helgeland, and then Chris's son Bob Helgeland, and Bob Dickson got involved in it, and then Bob took it over from, or bought out, Bob Dickson bought out Bob Helgeland, and then Bob's had it, I don't know how many years he's had it as his own, and now it's transitioning over to Dave. But my inclination, I always, in my head, had it in the '50s that he started it. Sometime in the '50s, so that'd be fifty plus years...

LO: Sure.

RG: ...old.

LO: And Chris is for Chris Helgeland?

RG: Yes. Chris Electronics is Chris Helgeland. So yeah. Which, you know, it's funny, because I'll sometimes show up on a boat and, hey, Chris, this is the problem here. It's like, because they,

and that happens to all of us because they forget that they maybe they associate that the guy that's working on the boat is the guy that owns the company, and it's funny, it's a little joke and, and unfortunately we have to say there is no more Chris at Chris Electronics, but so that's kind of a little running joke with the customers and, and us, you know.

LO: Well great.

RG: Thank you.

LO: So, thank you, very much, I really appreciate it. Any last...

RG: Any parting words? I, I don't, this was actually a pretty fun experience. Easier than I thought it would be.

LO: That's the way we like to make it.

RG: Yeah, painless. Yup.

LO: Excellent. Well, thank you very much.

RG: So. Hopefully you can put Jamie through and make him sweat, you know?

LO: That's it. We'll get Bob Dickson too...

RG: Yeah, there you go.

LO: ...succumb.

RG: Yes.

LO: All right. All right.

[54:41] End of interview